

One's success in painting a head or a figure is pretty much commensurate with one's ability to draw the same with some degree of accuracy. There is a direct relationship between the colors employed and the planes of figure or head to be painted under a given set of light conditions. One has to understand the play of light from high light through local color, halftones, shadow edges, into the shadow, the reflected lights and the cast shadows, the values to be given these planes and consequently the colors to be used.

Most figure painting up to the middle of the 19th century was done according to a system. Direct painting from the model with attention to particular light conditions and specific, of the moment phenomena, came after that. What is to be said here partakes of both systems.

COLORS: Yellow: ochre, cadmium medium, Naples (sometimes)
Red : alizarin crimson, light red (cadmium, vermillion)
Blue : cobalt, ultramarine
Green : oxide of chromium, viridian, terre verte
Brown : sienna-raw and burnt, umber-raw and burnt
White : zinc
Black : ivory

This is a suggested palette. Painters use other colors. Whatever the colors are they are aimed at the same general result. It is said that Titian used only black, red and yellow for flesh painting. The elements of a good scientific system lie in these three colors as much as they do in the above larger range of colors.

LIGHT CONDITIONS

LIGHT FROM THE NORTHERN SKY (no sun)

The light will be cool. Since the flesh reflects to some degree the light cast upon it, the highest values must be on the cool or bluish side. The ultimate in reflecting is of course the mirror, and it is obvious that the sky, clouds, birds and trees would reflect clearly. Patent leather shoes would reflect a great deal, as would a shiny satin or taffeta. The eyeball reflects. Observe the selfportraits of Durer, and note that the shape of the window is to be found in the high light on the eyeball.

The shadows will be warm by contrast since they do not face the light source. The light is tangent to the surface at certain areas and all form beyond this point is in shadow. It follows that the shadow will be darker than the light. Such light as is found in the shadow is reflected light, not direct light. Its candlepower is less than that of the direct light, assuming that the light through the window is the only direct light. (If there are two windows, on either side of the model, or an artificial source of light on one side and the window on the other, what would be the shadow with one source of light may have the same illumination as the light side. It can even have the same candlepower and therefore appear just as light. In this case the shadow or darker areas will appear down the middle of the head or figure.)

The color of the shadow depends upon what colors and surfaces are close to it. If the reflecting source is flesh the shadow will be very warm. If the source is a blue cloth or object, the shadow will partake of this color. Thus with colored clothes, each different color will be found in some degree in the painting of the shadow.

SO, LIGHTS ON THE COOL SIDE AND SHADOWS AT THE WARM SIDE.

AND: LIGHTS ARE HIGHER IN VALUE ALWAYS THAN SHADOWS. A

CLEAR AND MARKED DIFFERENCE MUST APPEAR HERE NO MATTER HOW LIGHT THE SHADOW IS OR HOW DARK THE LIGHTS ARE. The shadow side of the street is darker than the sunny side of the street. SEE this and OBSERVE this and think about it and DO NOT MIX UP LIGHTS AND DARKS. NEVER the twain shall meet, except by transition through the shadow edge.

THE LIGHT SIDE OF THE HEAD OR FIGURE:

The light side is made up of high lights, local colors and light grays which grade into the shadow edge and shadow. Complexions vary considerably. The basic color of skin is malinin: yellow. The red comes from the capillaries close to the surface. The grays come from the angle of the planes of the head or body as they receive light from the light source. Men with dark hair will show black and gray along the parts of the face that have to be shaved, sometimes looking very blue. Taking the head as a whole the colors to be looked for are:

Forehead: yellow and orange, some hint of red and violet as more or less of the cranium is revealed.

Nose: distinctly on the red, pink side, warm red and tending towards yellow and gray where the glasses rest. Texture is oily, so that a high light can be looked for.

Cheeks: violet and red and pink, varying with different subjects.

Chin: varies a lot, can be yellowish-red, violet, somewhere in the fairly warm, sometimes cool.

Mouth: (above and below): yellowish, bluish, sometimes even yellow green. Not red.

Side of Face: jaw line and back to the ear from the cheek bone can be yellowish with some reddish, violet, cool bluish towards yellow, not as red as cheeks or nose.

Ear: red getting lighter in the lower parts. Shiny, as it is oily or waxy requiring high lights.

N. B. : all suggested colors are a combination of red, blue and yellow colors on the palette. It is the amount of each primary used that determines just how yellow, red, blue, gray, etc., an area should be when

mixed with white.

COLORS OF THE BODY:

Just as the head has been given a slight analysis as to its general coloration, so the body can be too.

The body colorings:

Head: on the reddish, violet, lavender side taken as a whole when compared with all the rest of the body.

Neck: greenish, yellowish, bluish.

Shoulders: yellowish, bluish, sometimes a touch of orange.

Chest: at pit of neck violet or towards the red.

WHEN BONES COME TO THE SURFACE THE COLOR USUALLY TENDS TOWARDS THE RED SIDE OF THE PALETTE.

Abdomen: yellowish, greenish, bluish, olive greens, even browns.

Forearm: orange, blue, red, violet

Hands: reddish to yellow and violet

Thigh: yellowish, orange, bluish tending to the reds as you come to the knee.

Lower Leg: reddish and violet, some yellows and orange, rather deeper in value as the blood stays there in some poses.

Foot: blues and reds and yellows.

These are very general considerations as to colors. What is the

MOST IMPORTANT IS TO COMPARE EVERLASTINGLY ONE PART OF THE BODY

WITH ANOTHER. ONLY IN THIS WAY CAN YOU DECIDE THE COLOR OF A PAR-

TICULAR PART. Flesh colors are really grays of varying sorts. In

large part it is difficult to say just what color a part is. One way to get at it is to try and determine what it is not. Or if it is red, is it a warm red or a cool one, high intensity, low intensity, etc. COLORS TO BE USED IN PAINTING HEAD OR FIGURE:

The light side: cobalt, yellow ochre and alizarin crimson or light red. These plus white. As the form turns towards the shadow and the values darken, raw sienna can be used in place of yellow ochre. The shadow edge can be made with raw umber or burnt umber (if the area is toward the red side) plus the three primaries. The shadow can be made of raw sienna, burnt sienna, umber plus any of the primaries needed. TRY TO KEEP WHITE OUT OF THE SHADOW AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. You can not do without white, but overuse of it leads to all sorts of trouble, and dirty out of proper value color.

A general thought that works is to realize that in juxtaposing the colors you go from warm to cool to warm to cool to warm to cool. Thus the highlight will be cool, local color warm, the gray on the light side coolish, the shadow warm, the cast shadow relatively cool. This is a very general rule to follow, but it works in most cases. Warm on warm or cool on cool usually leaves you a dry looking passage. In all painting, not alone flesh, this idea of the warm and the cool is very useful. Also the use of complimentary colors to create contrast and interest is a basic thought.

INCANDESCENT OR WARM LIGHT:

The light source is warm. Under conditions in a studio the effect will be to make everything warmer and in the same order of coloring as if the light were cool. In mixing such colors it will probably be necessary to employ cadmium yellow to reach the true color. Grays and reflected lights and all the rest follow the same positions as they occur in the cool light situation, but in a warmer series around a form.

If there is a cool source in addition to the warm source, such as a light coming through the window from outside, and assuming that the candle-power of the incandescent light is greater than that of the window source, the cool side will follow the same system as if it were the only source of light. Thus the light parts will be cool and the darker parts will be warm. Violet and bluish tones, greenish blue and cool tending grays will be seen in the lighter areas.

Out of doors and especially towards sunset the light will be very warm and the shadow side cool. Within the shadow, however, the darker parts will be warm. The theory is that the blue sky opposite the sun will illuminate the object with cool light. The parts of the object, head or figure that face the sun will be warm. The shadow edges will be coolish neutrals. Here more bluish tones will be evident out of doors than in the studio. As objects recede in the distance the light sides will appear warm and the dark sides cool. The reflected lights from warm objects and the darker parts will be suffused in a cool haze at great distances. Up close this is not true, for one can look directly into the local colors and there is no haze. One of the great mistakes of thousands of outdoor amateurs is to paint everything warm and yellow and orange on the light side and violet and blue in the shadow. There is some cool from the sky up close, but there is also local color to be observed.

INFLUENCE OF IMMEDIATE BACKGROUNDS ABOUT THE MODEL:

The eye tends to react strongly to complimentary color. There are, of course, physical laws governing the science of color.

In painting a head before a green background it will appear redder than it is because of the complimentary colors involved. Thus, the tendency will be to employ too much red and thereby increase the redd look of the head as the actual paint on the canvas gives the complimentary color reaction. To insure proper coloring see to it that yellows are a bit yellow green, that orange can be made next the green background with yellow alone or a minimum of red added. HOLD BACK ON THE RED SIDE.

Thus, in painting against a red background the greens will come forward. This means that to paint a yellow one must paint something near orange if the red background is close to the area. And so with blue the yellow or orange will come out and one must be careful to employ enough of the cool tones to counter the tendency. And with a yellow background the danger lies in painting the head too cool. As has been said above, when the angle shows these backgrounds reflecting into the shadow parts of the head and the figure, one will add some of the color of the background to the shadow. If the background is very close to the head or figure, it will reflect strongly. Thus "Do you like butter and you hold a buttercup flower under someone's chin. The reflection is very yellow indeed.

PROCEDURE FROM THE BEGINNING:

Paint the farthest planes first. This means background. It is easy to see that the colors in the flesh depend upon the color and value of the background. Then paint the clothes if the figure is draped, as the colors of the clothes will affect the flesh color of course. Next, paint in the hair and, finally, start the flesh.

* IN GENERAL, PAINT EVERYTHING A LITTLE DARKER THAN IT LOOKS TO YOU. It is easier to come up in value than to go down, and your color will be richer this way. Observe carefully which is darker, the background or the flesh of the head, or the hair. Watch values like a hawk. DON'T PUT IN THE HIGHEST OR THE LOWEST VALUES UNTIL YOU ARE NEARLY THROUGH WITH YOUR PAINTING.

The lay in should be generalized. One could almost say in laying in a whole figure that he could make the hair brown (one value), the rest of the head on the red-violet lavender side, the neck greenish yellow, the chest warm reddish to yellow to violet, the abdomen greenish to olive to yellow to blue and so on. ALWAYS IN LARGE AREAS.

* DO NOT START TO FINISH WITH THE FIRST LAY IN. Put in the details after the whole is going together, each local color change and value change in proper order BY COMPARISON WITH ALL OTHERS.

* BE CERTAIN THAT THE VALUES YOU USE DESCRIBE IN THREE DIMENSIONS THE HEAD THAT YOU ARE PAINTING. PAINTING IS AS MUCH DRAWING AS IT IS ANYTHING ELSE IF YOU WISH TO REPRESENT WHAT YOU SEE OUT IN FRONT OF YOU. PUT SHAPE IN EVERY BRUSH STROKE.

Don't pitter-patter in a single spot. Keep your brushes clean. Have plenty of paint rags. They are as important to you as your colors, canvas and brushes.

* THE GREAT BRUSH STROKE: this is a stroke that places the right color in the right place in the right value and the right shape. STUDY VELASQUEZ AND HALS if you want to see what a real sharp-shooter could do. None better at this kind of painting.

Keep the darker parts of the painting thin in paint as compared with the light areas. The highest light should have the most paint - really opaque and light resistant.

In painting hair and solid colored objects (backgrounds, drapery, furniture, etc.) mix what you think is the proper middle tone and cover the whole area with it. Then make a dark (shadow) and a light:

You will need more than three tones, but most of the work can be done with these three. If the model has curly hair, do the curls last. Put your colors on a solid object as a sculptor would place the clay - in broad planes. Add the decoration (the curls) later on. Keep things as simple as you can. The job of painting a head is a very involved one and calls for a supreme effort of mental and manual dexterity. Do things in order and generally, as you begin, and the complication won't be nearly so great.

GET AWAY FROM YOUR WORK. Walk several miles during the morning or afternoon. SQUINT at the head until you almost do not see it. This gives you what you should have at the first lay in. Paint only what you can see from your position. If you want great detail get two feet from the model's head. Look at Velasquez' "Surrender of Breda" or "The Spinners" and note how the detail goes out of the heads as they recede in the distance.

This does not say it all. Write me if you have questions.

DRAW and GOD BLESS YOU.

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25-VII-63